



South Central District Health

Keeping your family & community healthy
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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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District Health Promoting Dental Care During Pregnancy

Research suggests that women with periodontal disease have up to a seven-fold increase in preterm low birth weight infants. Unfortunately, only one third of Idaho women, and only 13% of those on Medicaid, report seeing a dentist for care during their pregnancies. As a result, South Central District Health and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare are initiating the Idaho Oral Health Project for Pregnant Women. The project goal is to educate pregnant women about the importance of dental care during pregnancy and to refer those with oral health risk factors or untreated dental disease for services.

District Health initiated a program in this region in which obstetricians and family practice physicians refer their pregnant patients to local dentists. The participating local dentists agree to see these pregnant patients for limited dental services for relief of pain or infection that could affect the health of their unborn baby. After the dentist completes the visit, he/she faxes the results back to the referring physician.

Currently there are 29 participating dentists in the following counties: one in Blaine County, two each in Minidoka and Lincoln counties, three in Gooding County, four each in Cassia and Jerome counties, and 12 in Twin Falls County. There are also currently 37 obstetricians or family practice physicians participating in the following counties: one each in Lincoln and Gooding counties, five in Blaine County, seven in Cassia County, 11 in Jerome County, and 12 in Twin Falls County.

It's a common myth that pregnant women should avoid seeing a dentist. In fact, the opposite is true. Because of the possible link between dental disease and premature birth, all pregnant women should see a dentist at least once during their pregnancy. The Academy of Periodontology recommends that this visit happen as early as possible in the pregnancy.

In 2004, 10.5% of births, or 299 babies, in south central Idaho were born prematurely. Idaho Medicaid reports that low-birthweight babies cost 10 times more than non-premature babies (\$35,776 vs. \$3,499 after one year). If all the mothers of these babies had received dental care during their pregnancies

to address periodontal disease, an estimated 54 preterm births may have been prevented and \$1,742,958 may have been saved.

National Institutes of Health report that as many as 18% of premature, low-birthweight infants born in the United States annually may be attributed to periodontal disease. This is the same percentage attributed to smoking.

For more information about this project, please call Susie Beem, Dental Program Coordinator for South Central District Health, at 737-5946.

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(Editors: To speak with Dr. Adam Hodges (dentist) or Dr. Jane Scott (perinatologist) about their knowledge of this issue, please call Dr. Hodges at 436-0734 and Dr. Scott at 733-4343.)